

(PRESS RELEASE)

WATER – A RIGHT TO LIFE

(Two-day conference – February 25 & 26, 2006)

Bangalore, February 24, 2006: Today, our water sources are in peril and there are several concerns that need to be addressed urgently. **Right from the Water Policies of India and Karnataka to groundwater over-exploitation and water privatization**, each of these issues are connected to the quality of our lives and the community at large.

- **While eight years ago, digging up to 40 feet below the ground would have sufficed for a borewell in Bangalore, today these have to be dug up to 600 feet to strike water!**
- **Abuse of water resources, deforestation** in the name of economic growth and the threat of **foreign-led policies** are endangering our water and its equitable distribution in India.
- It is in this context that **nearly 30 organisations have come together under - Forum for Water Sovereignty** - to bring about a consciousness among citizens on the seriousness of these issues, on how they impact all our lives and how we as individuals can make a difference by ensuring conservation of water resources and standing up against unfair policies that deny water access to millions of vulnerable communities.

According to **Mr. Rajendra Singh (Ramon Magsaysay Awardee 2001 for Community Leadership¹)**, **General Secretary, Tarun Bharat Sangh, and vice-president, SVARAJ (formerly Oxfam India) :**

“It is important that people from all walks of life come together to learn, educate, conserve and fight for water rights and bring water issues to the forefront – be it as consumers or policy makers. Community driven, decentralized water management is the need of the hour and we all have a part to play in this.”

At the present rates of consumption, it is estimated that the demand for freshwater will outstrip supply by the year 2030. **According to UN projections India will become water-stressed by the year 2025, and we are already witness to rampant regional water scarcities which badly hit the poor.**

In the state of **Karnataka too, lack of equitable access to water and over-exploitation of water resources** are issues the state is no stranger to.

WATER CONFERENCE - SENSITISING PEOPLE TO CRITICAL ISSUES

The campaign for right to water and against water privatization in Bangalore has already brought together people's organizations, NGOs and individuals who have highlighted its impact on people living in slums without adequate access to water.

¹ Rajendra Singh's main contribution has been in the field of Rain-water Harvesting in Rajasthan where watershed work has been undertaken in 850 villages. Of these, 90 have been made drought-proof. This means, that even if these villages receive less than 3 inches of rain per annum they will face none of the hardships of drought. All TBS's projects are of the people, for the people and by the people. (Source: www.tarunbharatsangh.org)

- The conference will have participatory sessions chaired by noted academicians, People's Movements' & NGO representatives, water sector experts, citizens' associations, policy experts, affected communities and public participants.

According to Mr. Dominic, Programme Officer, SVARAJ & Co-ordinator for the Conference on 'Water – A Right to Life' : " If there is no drinking water for the citizens of India, it is a mockery of democracy. Water is a common resource and no one has a right to over-exploit it."

PEOPLE'S MARCH TO DHARMAMBUDHI KERE

The two-day conference will culminate in a **People's March to Dharmambudhi Kere** (Kanteerava Stadium) led by Mr. Rajendra Singh at **5 pm on February 26, 2006**. This is aimed at sensitizing the residents of Bangalore and across India to the urgency of action required to safeguard our water resources.

LIST OF SPEAKERS AT THE CONFERENCE

The list of eminent speakers has people who have devoted their lives to the cause of water conservation and water rights. They include Water Gandhi & Magsaysay Awardee **Mr Rajendra Singh**, environmentalist **Mr. Yallappa Reddy**, MD, Karnataka Urban Water Supply & Drainage Board **Mr. Srinivas Reddy**, **Mr. Suresh** (from Reclaiming Public Water - Chennai), author and commentator **Mr. Shivasundar** and Writer & Working President, Sarvodaya Karnataka, **Mr. Devanoor Mahadeva**, among others.

ORGANIZATIONS THAT ARE PART OF THIS WATER CONFERENCE

- ❖ The Geological Society of India, Bangalore
- ❖ Gandhi Adhyayana Kendra, Bangalore University
- ❖ Svaraj, Bangalore
- ❖ Janasahyog, Bangalore
- ❖ Sarvodaya Karnataka Party, Karnataka
- ❖ Arkavati-Kumudwati River Rejuvenation Committee, Bangalore
- ❖ Karnataka Jal Biradri, Gadag
- ❖ Dalitha Sangharsha Samithi (Ambedkar vada), Bangalore
- ❖ Karnataka Dalitha Sangharash Samithi, Bangalore
- ❖ Karnataka Slum Peoples' Joint Action Committee
- ❖ Karnataka Vimochana Ranga
- ❖ PUCL Karnataka
- ❖ Chowki Samskruti Kendra, Bangalore
- ❖ Samvada Bangalore
- ❖ Campaign Against Water Privatization, Bangalore
- ❖ Samudaya, Karnataka
- ❖ Urban Research Centre, Bangalore
- ❖ Janajagruti Samithi, Doddaballapur
- ❖ Water Journalists' Forum, Karnataka
- ❖ APSA, Bangalore
- ❖ TREES, Kolar
- ❖ CIVIC, Bangalore
- ❖ SAMAJIKA KRIA Samiti
- ❖ KOVAN – Kolar
- ❖ Security Guards and House Keeping Union – Bangalore